

The Pleasures of Reification: Kelvin Corcoran's *Lyric Lyric*

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In 1990, at the tender age of sixteen, I sent a questionnaire to Kelvin Corcoran in order to find out more about his poetry for a piece of A-level coursework I was writing under the tutelage of Robert Sheppard, which also involved writing to the poets Ken Edwards and Elaine Randell. In response to my somewhat naive but qualified question: 'what can you say about the "content" of your work, e.g. if there are specific long-standing preoccupations in it?' Corcoran responded:

Preoccupations is a clear enough word. Thinking inside the physical form of the language for the pleasure of reification. Whatever is happening – most recently writing about driving on motorways. You tell me. (Questionnaire response 1990)

The phrases 'clear enough' and 'you tell me' reveal a terseness that characterised Corcoran's overall response – reluctant to be drawn by my schoolboy questions, impatient with my grasping at notions I barely understood. As he put it in his accompanying letter

[I] trust you can excuse the apparently abrupt tone in some of the responses. I wonder if you might be better off with the poetry and ignoring the poets, certainly this one anyway. I could more usefully respond to specific comments on one of my poems I think. (Letter to the author 1990)

That said, 'you tell me' is not an entirely inappropriate division of labour directed at the would-be critic. As it was, the rather richer second sentence of Corcoran's questionnaire response gave me a highroad into writing about his poetry, illuminating the series of depictions of the book as an object in his 1985 collection *The Red and Yellow Book*. It enabled me to think about the relationship between literature and the world, and to attend briefly to the politics of 1988's *Qiryat Sepher*.

A few years later, having by this time gone up to read English with Linguistics at university, I received a copy of *Lyric Lyric* in the post with a friendly note from Corcoran which read: 'here's a *Lyric Lyric* for you as you are responsible for a good line thinking back to your letter of sometime ago.'¹ The good line in question appears in the opening stanza of

the third to last (untitled) poem in the book, and turned out to be the sentence from the questionnaire, only very slightly altered:

In blue September between blue blinds
I write and drink, thinking of money,
thinking inside the physical forms of words
for the pleasures of reification.
(*Lyric Lyric* 38)

Aside from the thrill of feeling oneself to have been somehow instrumental in the creation of significant poetry, this episode reveals something about how the discourse of poetics works in relation to creative practice. Here I am following one of Robert Sheppard's many definitions of poetics as: 'the products of the process of reflection upon writings, and upon the act of writing, gathering from the past and from others, speculatively casting into the future' (Sheppard 99). As Sheppard has argued, poetics lets writers 'question what they think they know' and allows creative work the possibility of 'dialogue with itself' (Sheppard 100). By responding to my youthful questioning, Corcoran articulated an idea which fed directly back into his creative practice, and his overall approach to poetics is also revealing of the dynamic and sometimes tense relationship between the discourses. In the same year that he responded to my questionnaire, Corcoran was interviewed by Peterjon Skelt for the book *Prospect into Breath: Interviews with North and South Writers*. Skelt's introduction to the interview reveals a fraught process of negotiation:

The following text has been extensively edited and nearly did not appear at all. At one stage the author requested that only a short series of poems be printed, which he selected from each of his books except the first, with the introduction: 'In response to questions about his background, writing processes, politics and audience, KC offered these poems.' (Skelt 156)

There is a pervasive shortness on Corcoran's part throughout the whole conversation which includes remarks such as 'I don't really have a view of my work. I can't see it' (Skelt 158) and

If I had to try and say what I thought I was doing in a book in terms of the sections or the forms, it would be unidentifiable in the end. I don't think there is any other version of that experience apart from the poem. (Skelt 158-59)

There is an almost defensive anxiety here that to probe the creative process too much would risk destroying it – a familiar refrain in university Creative Writing workshops throughout the land. However, Corcoran's attitude reveals something suggestive about his view of the respective roles of writer and reader. In response to Skelt's question about whether his work has changed over the years, Corcoran uses the same labour-dividing phrase as in his response to my questions: 'You tell me. You read me quite closely' (Skelt 162). Replying to Skelt's question about the social responsibility of the poet, he adds: 'the responsibilities to the reader are [...] not to confuse what can be said in a poem with what can be said in an interview' (Skelt 165). To this end, Corcoran seems to finally get his way when, in response to Skelt's final question – concerning his subject's aim to work out 'how poetry can be a political weapon to attack my enemies' – he offers a poem as the last word of the interview: 'The only way I can answer you is this.' (Skelt 166)ⁱⁱ

This strategy is replicated more fully in Corcoran's response to Denise Riley's broad invitation to contribute to her 1992 edited volume *Poets on Writing: Britain 1970-1991* with, as she puts it in her introduction, 'anything to do with the working processes of poetry and the surroundings of those processes' (Riley 2). Corcoran submitted a further four pages of what was still yet to become *Lyric Lyric* under the title 'Sometimes a Word will Start it' – also presented as an epigraph from John Ashbery. In fact Corcoran had reflected on this phrase in the Skelt interview and added his own qualification 'sometimes a letter will start it' (Skelt 157) which is presented here after the epigraph as simply 'Sometimes a letter,' suggesting another line of feedback from the articulation, however reluctantly, of poetics to develop creative thought.

Riley's own reflections on editing the volume reveal a sense of uncertainty about the status and genre of the writings collected: 'they subside, a bit uneasily, between being critical pieces which can be tampered with, and expressions of belief which can't' (Riley 3). Moreover she finds there is a 'real uncertainty as to what the standing of these writers' prose pieces to the poetry is.' (Riley 3) Whilst assuming that what a writer says about writing will have a 'different kind of interest' from what a non-writing critic might say, for Riley the real value of the discourse lies in its relationship, however myriad, with the poetry:

The penumbra of writing around the poetry here *is* the extended material of and for the poems, for their life and working conditions; so that to put it forward could strengthen the understanding of these for both readers and writers. (Riley 3-4)

This sense of poetics as the ‘extended material’ of and for poems accounts very well for the fact of Corcoran’s questionnaire response turning up in one of his poems. Certainly my encounter with Corcoran’s poetics as articulated in his letter to me was enabling for my critical writing on his poetry, but it is also interesting to note how his practice blurs still further the already fraught boundary between poetics and creative work that Riley reflects on, and which continues to be a focus of debate within the context of teaching and research in Creative Writing in the academy. In the case of *Lyric Lyric* in particular, the conditions under which it comes into being are a clear theme, and will be considered below.

In a move characteristic of my own critical practice, and reaching back to my use of Corcoran’s remarks twenty-three years ago, I want to examine his use of the word reification as a key into the poetics of *Lyric Lyric*, and his poetics more generally. Reification in its basic definition means to convert a person or abstract concept mentally into a thing, to materialize it. The origins of the word and its common usage however point more specifically to its occurrence in Marx’s writings, and the concept was later developed extensively by Lukács and also finds expression in Adorno’s writings. In addition there are significant later treatments by Frederic Jameson and Gillian Rose. What is at stake in the concept in a Marxist usage is the way in which, due to the commodity exchanges that take place in a capitalist society, a relation between people takes on ‘the character of a thing.’ (Honneth 96) In Honneth’s reading of Lukács he identifies three directions of reification:

Subjects in commodity exchange are mutually urged (a) to perceive given objects solely as ‘things’ that one can potentially make a profit on, (b) to regard each other solely as ‘objects’ of profitable transactions, and finally (c) to regard their own abilities as nothing but supplemental ‘resources’ in the calculation of profit opportunities. (96-97)

For Lukács, under capitalism, reification has come to constitute our ‘second nature’ (Honneth 98). The implications of this analysis are profound, and constitute an important aspect of Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism and theory of value. Other accounts of reification, including Rose’s, bring into focus the huge questions of the relationship between substance

and subject (object and concept) and between actuality and change as what is really at stake for this term.

Andrew Duncan has indicated that Corcoran has a background in Marxist theoryⁱⁱⁱ but it seems unlikely that the sense in which he sees the process of writing as one that engenders the *pleasures* of reification would be in accordance with a strictly Marxist use of the term. The key instead seems to lie in Corcoran's material sense of language – the physical forms of words that are the agent of this pleasurable translation of thinking into a poem – and in this his poetics seems engaged with an enquiry into the relationship between substance and subject, and what follows from this as a politics.

This concern with reification also occurs in a short poem contained in 1999's *When Suzy Was*, and represents another instance of a discussion of poetics presented as a prose poem.^{iv} The original volume has the subtitle 'A Book of Answers' on the flyleaf, and it is the (almost) eponymous poem that I want to attend to, whose opening paragraph reads:

THE BOOK OF ANSWERS

We sat at the truth table in the quiet house and I told Lee about The Book of Answers, as a way to try to think about what is always there: the alphabet, an etched model of silence that speaks. (Nonnus) My conceit to make the physical condition of language, the arrangement of the struts, curves and sounds, the form of discovered truth. Completely simple questions. To think about what is always there: reification as a type of behaviour in the moment of the poem. (*When Suzy Was* 10)

The 'truth table' – a device used to determine the logical validity of propositions – appears several times in *Lyric Lyric*, but here also functions as the scene of an exchange between two writers, that is, between Corcoran and the poet Lee Harwood. Harwood was later the subject of a series of six interviews that Corcoran conducted between 2007 and 2008 and published as *Not the Full Story* in 2008.^v

The focus of the conversation here discovers the Book of Answers as an enquiry into the alphabet, the image of which seems to derive from the following lines of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* (Book IV, verse 261-265):

But Cadmos brought gifts of thought and voice for all Hellas; he fashioned tools to echo the sounds of the tongue, he mingled sonant and consonant in one order of

connected harmony. So he rounded off a graven model of speaking silence; for he had learnt the secrets of his country's sublime art. (Nonnus 1940)

This evocation of the power of the 'graven model of speaking silence' is pervasive in Corcoran's oeuvre, where a concern with the materiality of text is often explored through the history of writing systems. In *Lyric Lyric* there is a reference to the thirty incised graffiti in a Proto-Sinaitic (19c BCE) script found in the turquoise mines of Serabit el-Khadem which are considered to be the earliest known alphabetic script. Corcoran's line 'ten years to read one word' (*Lyric* 8) reflects a situation in which, a hundred years after the script's discovery, still only one phrase of the script has been translated. In the Skelt interview, he describes the organisation of 1990's *The Next Wave* as 'an absurd way of saying this is a clay tablet, with the illegible inscriptions on it.' (Skelt 160) 'Tocharian the I-E Enclave' refers to the ancient Indo-European language of Tocharian discovered in eighth-century scripts found in Chinese Turkestan which confounded assumptions about the Western provenance of centum languages, leading to Corcoran's reflection on 'another language like ours, | used by people unlike us' (*Lyric* 17).

Continuing this thread, 1998's *Qiryat Sepher* ('city of the book') is named after a city on contested land in the Middle East, mentioned in Joshua and Judges, a large number of whose contemporary occupants are devoted to scriptural study. In the Skelt interview Corcoran refers to *Qiryat Sepher* as the 'city of the letter,' and 'the site where a very early alphabet was unearthed' (Skelt 160-61). The translation of the city's name is implausible as letter, given the clear sense given to *sepher* as book in transliterated Hebrew. In correspondence, Corcoran speculated:

Qiryat/Kiryat means city, town in Hebrew and I imagine in other Semitic languages. *Sepher* as in glyph or suggestively an etched letter. (The meanings of cypher spin everywhere, secret writing, magic and beyond) [...] I read a book on the history of the alphabet, an encyclopaedia of the alphabet, a library copy. There was some speculation about a site in Northern Syria where fragments of a very early alphabet were discovered. City of the Letter: *Qiryat Sepher* may well be my invention of a name for that place [...] Serabit el-Khadem in the Sinai is a better literal candidate. It is an actual place. [...] In the book *Qiryat Sepher*, the poem of the same name, alludes to this speculative etymology. The scene has shifted to the contemporary but the archaeological dust still drifts and there's something to be unearthed to set things


right. The poem on p8 in *Lyric Lyric* is more of a literal claim about the possible origins of the alphabet, I think, than the *Qiryat Sepher* poem. (Email to the author 2013)


Qiryat Sepher nevertheless abounds with images of the material nature of text: ‘ideograms pinned on the dock wall [...] the fiery circuit of the word’ (*New and Selected Poems* 169); ‘the articulate speech you taught me | my kind king, I send you a line’ (170); and, in the poem ‘Qiryat Sepher’ itself: ‘signs and values abound | unearth the native script | to free the falling crowd.’ (171)

This concern with the ancient origins of writing systems underwrites the depth to which Corcoran feels the pleasures of reification. His poetics, fascinated by the micro-architecture of writing – its ‘struts, curves and sounds’ – is also committed to the ‘form of discovered truth,’ as if truth resides in writing like an ancient script lies in the earth, waiting to be revealed in an act of Heideggerian unconcealment. That said, Corcoran wants to wear this truth lightly as if it is part of the everyday: ‘completely simple questions.’ The repetition of the phrase ‘to think about what is always there’ draws a parallel between the objects of both sentences in this passage: first, the alphabet, and secondly, reification itself. This identification suggests a poetics concerned with reflecting on the act of writing in its most fundamental material form.

This poetics is radically dramatised in the prose poem which appears on page seven of *Lyric Lyric*, which also forms the first section of ‘Sometimes a Word will Start it.’ Here the act of writing is figured as a physical excavation:

I could write through the table, cursively gouge down to the hieroglyphics living in our capitals. B, E and M are some of my favourites; house, man and water. Dusted with logic and sand I set them right against gentlemen thieves burning in the east. The dirt piles up at my back, tradition blocking the stairs and the light at the bottom of the stairwell. (*Lyric* 7)

This extraordinary image is historically correct in that the letters B, E and M can be linked to hieroglyphic symbols. The Egyptian hieroglyph *per* –  – meaning ‘house’ was used to write the sound [b] in Semitic, because [b] was the first sound in the Semitic word for ‘house,’ *bayt*. The letter E can be traced back to a hieroglyph of a man with arms upraised –

𐤇 – which meant ‘joy’ or ‘rejoice’ and was transformed through Semitic *hê* (related to *hillul* – ‘jubilation’) and then into Greek epsilon. M has its origins as the hieroglyph –  – (actually equivalent to n) transformed via the Semitic *mem* for water. As this process of cursive extraction takes place, the dusting of logic suggests the table that has been written through could be another truth table like the one in ‘The Book of Answers.’ The dusting of sand however is used to make an allusion to more troubling relationships to the ancient world through the nineteenth century theft of Egyptian antiquities by the British aristocracy in the form of Henry Salt – appointed British consul-general in Cairo in 1815 – and his accomplice Giovanni Belzoni. As if on an archaeological dig, dirt piles up behind the narrator in his upper room study, blocking the light down the stairs. The pile of dirt is also seen as ‘tradition’ – as if the intervening accretion of material that has obscured the hieroglyphs is the outcome of a ritual repetition which has obscured the originary brilliance and truth of these symbols, and risks hindering the narrator’s freedom and security. Indeed in the next line the narrator calls out to someone downstairs: ‘Are you alright down there Linda? Is the baby alright?’ (*Lyric 7*). There is a possible link here with a moment in Corcoran’s interview with Peter Riley when Riley asks: ‘Do you think Linda’s all right sitting downstairs by herself all this time waiting for us?’ (Corcoran/Riley 16) The enquiry about the baby perhaps also reflects an anxiety about the narrator’s own contribution to history, if the baby is also his.

Here the poem risks a fantasy of return to an original shared truth, a vision of a language in which meaning is unambiguous, and yet the tone seems largely unironic as the narrator descends into a kind of tunnel, hoping that ‘all things will settle into all things’ and that he will arrive ‘at absolute normal breathing the air of a new speech.’ (7) The equation of ‘normal’ and ‘new’ here – elegantly across the shifting noun-verb ‘breathing’ – suggests something of the interest in ‘The Book of Answers’ in discovered truth as something simple and always there, an amalgam of a ‘make it new’ Modernist poetics alongside a more Wordsworthian interest in the ‘language really used by men’ – and indeed ‘lyrical ballads endure’ is a line in the first poem of *Lyric Lyric* (3). Later the poem appears to comment on itself as ‘entirely sincere and doesn’t feel like a fetish’ (7) – as if countering the more negative implications of the concept of reification, i.e. that it turns poetry into a fetish. Reification however seems to be applied to the narrator’s neighbours who are described as having a substance that ‘you can’t see through.’ (7) Whilst this suggests a metaphor for inscrutability giving rise to slightly more ironizing questions: ‘Are they agents? Are you?’ the narrator also questions an implied Marxist analysis: ‘It doesn’t look like economics.’ (7) Via

a remark in the Skelt interview which explains the phrase ‘verbal substance’ in *The Red and Yellow Book* as part of a quotation from Merleau-Ponty (Skelt 160), it might be possible to read this attribution of substance to people as a recognition of their embodied nature as opposed to a Marxist analysis of their economic determinism.

As it is, the powerful image of gouging through a writing table to reach hieroglyphic symbols is returned to in another prose poem which appears in both *Lyric Lyric* and ‘Sometimes a Word will Start it’ although the sequence of the lineated poems between and after the prose is different in each presentation. Here the hieroglyphic letters are folded back into what reads as autobiographical disclosure as the narrator offers an account of his father waiting at the gates of the ‘Midlands Electricity Board’ for his son to bring him ‘forgotten sandwiches’ (*Lyric 9*):

A small, strong man anxious to get back inside out of the rain. I remember this on the edge of town where the river ran through water meadows and layered silence in live trees. The woods rose to a story sky behind factories and industrial plots and the grey road shone like a dark mirror. Here’s your sandwiches dad. How much the drinking as percentage of the packet? (*Lyric 9*)

The use of setting here poises this exchange between the pastoral landscape of the river at the edge of town and the industrial cityscape, with the metaphors of a ‘story sky’ and the ‘dark mirror’ of the road figuring the creative activity of the writer. The ‘layered silence’ is also suggestive of Nonnus’ vision of the alphabet as ‘etched silence.’ The question about drinking is addressed elsewhere in ‘The Literal Poem About My Father’ which identifies Johnny Corcoran as an ‘alcoholic given to violence’ (*When Suzy Was 27*). In the present poem he is seen as ‘A bitter man, a rum man, an anything man in fact,’ (*Lyric 9*) with devastating puns on the tipples seen as personality traits. It is at this point that the hieroglyphics return as a kind of exegesis of the initial letters of the phrase ‘Midlands Electricity Board’:

M the wave sparkles
burning the time
drawn back to land

E man with downcast arms
Ireland, India, Burma, England

at the gates to nowhere

B house given up, empty

doss house, boarding

no home kept without her

(*Lyric 9*)

There is a haiku-like feel to these stanzas. The ‘M’ symbol evokes water, although this time a wave on the sea, rather than the river already mentioned. The image of sunlight on water that ‘sparkles’ suggests a kind of ambivalent agency for the wave, that is ‘burning the time’ – perhaps brilliantly and exuberantly, or wastefully – before it is ‘drawn back to land.’ The incorporation of part of the mapped-on word (‘Midlands’ to ‘land’ here) is also found in the next two stanzas. ‘E’ treats the figure of the narrator’s father in close comparison with the hieroglyph, but giving him ‘downcast arms,’ instead of upraised ones. The places mentioned suggest initially his Irish origins, and India and Burma may be places visited or post-colonial parallels as England hoves into view. Whatever the role of these places they leave him rather haplessly at the gates to nowhere, the refigured gates of the Electricity board. Finally ‘B’ very clearly concerns the house glyph – but in this case a house ‘given up,’ leading to other more transient modes of accommodation – the board of ‘Electricity Board’ returning as a ‘boarding’ house, after the loss of the mother (also described in the ‘Literal Poem’): ‘no home kept without her.’

These largely downbeat stanzas nevertheless show Corcoran very clearly thinking inside the physical forms of language – drilling down into the hieroglyphic substrata of the initial letters of his father’s workplace to overlay their past and present meanings together in an enquiry into the truth of his own personal history, as well as the origins of written language. This process is echoed later in *Lyric Lyric* in the poem ‘Hysterisis Loop’:

It was the time of end pieces,

the time of folding away the truth table

from which they had eaten

and scored into its surface

a name that belongs to something else. (33)

That the two prose pieces should be offered as a contribution to a book of poetics – as well as retaining their life within the environment of *Lyric Lyric* – is revealing of the extent to which Corcoran’s interest in reification as a ‘type of behaviour’ in the moment of composition as both the means by which his poems come into existence, and the subject of those poems.

Throughout the book environment of *Lyric Lyric*, however, this concern with the physical materiality of writing remains entangled with the other materiality of poetry as a sung (i.e. lyric) and spoken art. The repetition in the title perhaps hints at this duality – its excess inviting us to make a comparison, to find the dissimilar in the same. Following the evocation of *Lyrical Ballads* at the opening of the book, the narrator of the first poem declares ‘I go the straight song | straight music drives me.’ (*Lyric* 3) Taken together with the notion of sincerity, this seems to be another kind of statement of poetics – a commitment to straight talking, elsewhere caught as ‘an exact measure, a direct road.’ (6) Yet, this is not as straightforward a position as it might seem, as another prose poem in the collection argues:

Do you think I’m trying to make this difficult? You are not watching the disintegration of anything, where the first push went opening sound reduced to the scabby politics of acquaintance. Stuff it. The ripped voice makes us free. (20)

The narrator here appears to be answering a common criticism of innovative poetry as being wilfully difficult, despite his own commitment to the ‘straight song.’ He challenges this view by stating that his poetics does not reflect a breakdown (‘distintegration’) in communication. The syntax of the second clause of the second sentence is slippery, but seems to hint at the fate of a certain kind of Modernist poetics, if one identifies the ‘first push’ with Pound’s famous line ‘To break the pentameter, that was the first heave’ (Pound 532). One might expect Corcoran to align himself with this ‘push’ and the ‘opening’ of the sound-world of poetry that resulted, and yet this poetics appears reduced to the ‘scabby politics of acquaintance’ – perhaps a critique of the exclusive aspects of Modernist literary culture. Nevertheless, the piece concludes with a self-reflexive ‘stuff it’ as if to reject this reservation, making a bold assertion of the liberatory aspects of a disruptive poetics – ‘the ripped voice makes us free.’

Despite the seemingly de-politicised use of the term reification in Corcoran’s poetics, *Lyric Lyric* nevertheless operates a profound critique of contemporary society, which sees the narrator ‘bash my head on England’ (6) and cite Tom Raworth’s damning lines from ‘West Wind’: ‘colourless nation | sucking on grief’ (35) whilst stating baldly: ‘what I want doesn’t exist’ (37). Such a poetics confirms a belief in poetry as a force for political engagement,

despite risking its own reification in the Marxist sense. As such it could be compared to Adorno's view of the double character of the art work: that it is a fetish but also resistant to fetishism. As Adorno states in *Aesthetic Theory*: 'artworks are plenipotentiaries of things that are no longer distorted by exchange, profit, and the false needs of a degraded humanity.' (Adorno 298) It seems to be in the light of this view that Corcoran is able to share with us his pleasure in the manifold delights of a reification that is both aesthetically and politically liberating.

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ⁱ Corcoran reflects on this kind of gesture in the Skelt interview: ‘I send poems to people [...] because conversations turn into poetry. Or things that have happened and I may have mentioned to somebody, later appear as a poem anyway, and they may have a hand in it themselves. It seems like a friendly gesture.’ (164-5)

ⁱⁱ The poem, beginning ‘The garden surrounds me’ appears on pages 27-28 of *Lyric Lyric*. In the Skelt volume it is printed with two attributions to embedded quotations from Wittgenstein and Ben Okri. The poem describes an urban lockdown prior to the visit of the prime minister in an unspecified location, but is punctuated by visionary and lyrical moments. The poem ends with the litany: ‘Shame on you. Shame on you. Shame on you.’ (167) It could be read as a response to Margaret Thatcher’s 1982 visit to Cheltenham in the aftermath of the Falklands conflict.

ⁱⁱⁱ In a review of *Lyric Lyric*, Duncan writes: ‘Other members of the class, taught by Ralph Hawkins at Essex University around 1978, recall Kelvin as being theoretically worked-out to an amazing extent: he had a position, based on Adorno, which he could apply to everything.’ Viewable at: <http://www.pinko.org/12.html>. See also the poem ‘Adorno’ in *Qiryat Sepher (New and Selected 172)*.

^{iv} In the Skelt interview, Corcoran makes a claim for his use of prose sections alongside lineated pieces: ‘I want the thought to jump out of its skin, and sometimes you can do that with prose, to stand aside from the poetry, but sharpen the tension as well. To say something that is not normally said.’(159)

^v Despite his previous reluctance to engage with Skelt, it is worth noting Corcoran’s interest in the interview form as an occasion for poetics as also demonstrated by his important conversation with Peter Riley published as ‘Spitewinter Provocations: An Interview on the Condition of Poetry.’ In the current volume of course, Corcoran seems much more at ease with the interview as a mode for articulating his own poetics.